

Parks & Recreation Board Meeting Minutes

The Parks and Recreation Board of the City of Mesa met in a regular session at the Parks and Recreation office at 200 S. Center Street, Building 1, Mesa, on March 10, 2010.

Members Present:

Frank Alger
Milt Fort
Don Goodrum
Connie Gullatt-Whiteman
Steve Ikeda
Matt Shaffer
Michelle Udall
Marilyn Wilson
Ron Wills

Staff Present:

Darla Armfield	Mike Holste
Dawn Bies	Lily King-Cisneros
Jessie Brodersen	Natalie Lewis
J.D. Dockstader	Andrea Moore
Dale Furnas	Dyan Seaburg
Marc Heirshberg	

Members Absent:

David Martinez, excused
Mark Yarbrough, excused

The meeting was called to order at 3:30 p.m. by Don Goodrum, Vice-Chair.

Welcome and introductions

Don Goodrum introduced Marc Heirshberg, the new Parks, Recreation and Commercial Facilities Department Director, to the Board. Mr. Heirshberg thanked the Board for their service to Mesa and PRCF staff for their dedication and said he looks forward to working with everyone.

Mr. Heirshberg introduced Mayor Scott Smith who thanked the Board for their commitment and their involvement in the community. He told the Board that one of the challenges City Council has is defining basic core services, which means Police and Fire to many people. He said that while those services are very important, nobody wants to live in a city with only Police and Fire because that is not a community. He added that Mesa has, for decades, been a city with a quality of life that attracts people, with a parks system and parks and recreation program that is the envy of many cities in Arizona. He spoke briefly about the economic challenges Mesa is facing, that he didn't think it would last very long, and that Mesa would return to a time when it can invest in the resources needed to maintain high levels of service. He said we may have to look at things differently for the next couple of years and operate in a "maintenance only mode" to maintain current services, until the economy turns around and can be built upon.

Mayor Smith told the Board he welcomes their input about the things in Mesa that are important to them. He said that as we look at Mesa's strategic plan, understand that Mesa wants to maintain a wide variety of opportunities for its citizens.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Goodrum asked if there was a motion for approval of the minutes from the January 13, 2010 Parks Board meeting. Marilyn Wilson made a motion, Connie Gullatt-Whiteman seconded, and it was unanimously carried to approve the minutes.

Mr. Goodrum asked if there was a motion for approval of the Dogs in Parks subcommittee minutes from the February 25, 2010. Ron Wills made a motion, Milt Fort seconded, and it was unanimously carried to approve the minutes.

Presentation on Council strategic initiatives

Natalie Lewis from the City Manager's office presented the Council's strategic initiatives to the Board. The five (5) general initiatives the Council is focusing on include:

- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT that is innovative, development and business-friendly and that includes a variety of strategic tools, redevelopment of older and vacant areas, and a focus on high-value job creation and employment.
- QUALITY OF LIFE for citizens of Mesa that includes safe and clean neighborhoods and parks, transportation options, cultural and arts amenities, and excellent educational opportunities; all of which should be sustainable and environmentally responsible.
- COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT to build pride in our City and to encourage a wide range of civic leadership. This includes the involvement of neighborhoods, non-profit and faith-based organizations and direct communication with citizens.
- FINANCIAL STABILITY that provides proactive leadership and that considers all financial factors in order to achieve stable revenues, responsible budgeting and organizational efficiencies.
- REGIONAL LEADERSHIP that acknowledges that Mesa's and the region's well being are intertwined and recognizes Mesa's responsibility to be a leader of and an active participant in working with regional partners to find shared solutions to regional challenges that are innovative and sustainable.

Steve Ikeda asked about a canal in the Fiesta District plan. Mayor Smith said Mesa has teamed up with ASU's School of Planning who are using the Fiesta District as their class project. The students have come up with several different ideas for that area. One of the ideas was to turn the flood control drainage ditch into a walkable greenbelt.

Hear update on use of Basin 420 (8th St & Harris)

Andrea Moore gave the Board some information about the retention basin at 8th Street and Harris. She said it has been a retention basin since the mid 1980's and showed the Board an aerial photograph of the basin. She said there are retaining walls on three sides of this basin that come up against the sidewalk and the canal bank; the City later installed chain link fencing to keep people from accidentally falling in. She said that the city added an equipment gate to keep vehicles from driving into the basin. Approximately 5 years ago a pedestrian gate appeared which completely enclosed the basin. At that point residents started using the basin as an off leash dog area and have continued to do so for several years. Staff has recently started to receive complaints about off leash dogs in the basin and conflicts with people wanting to use the basin for drop in use. A couple of weeks ago the gates disappeared. Staff has received calls from residents on both sides of the issue (off-leash vs. on-leash). She told the Board that the basin is classified and managed as one of the City's 130 retention basins, which allows on-leash dogs per park rules. Requests have been received to put the gates back up and designate the basin as off-leash and also requests to leave gates off for drop-in use and on-leash dogs.

Ms. Moore pointed out the "doggie pot" in the basin which holds bags and trash for people to use to clean up after their dogs. These pots are placed by request only.

Ms. Moore told the Board there is quite a bit of interest from the neighborhood regarding this issue. Therefore, staff recommends scheduling a neighborhood meeting with the surrounding

residents to get their feedback on the basin. Staff can come back before the Board in May 2010 with a recommendation such as making it an off-leash facility, leaving as is, designating it as a dog park or some other solution. She asked for comments from the Board.

Ms. Wilson asked whether City staff had removed the gates at the basin. Ms. Moore said the City did not remove them but the gates were gone now.

Michelle Udall asked if the City had paid for the gates. Ms. Moore said the City purchased the double gates but not the pedestrian gate. Ms. Udall asked if there was access to the canal from the side where the gates are and whether it was a safety issue for children playing in the basin. Ms. Moore replied that there is not access on the canal side but there is a paved path on the canal.

Frank Alger added that he regularly goes by that basin and sees some kids but mostly off-leash dogs in the basin. He's never seen any type of organized sports there.

Ms. Udall asked how far away the nearest park is from that basin which can be used for sports. Ms. Moore replied that there is Hawthorne School located within the neighborhood; Kino Jr. High is approximately one mile, Pioneer Park, Reed Park, and Mountain View Park are the nearest parks with green space.

Public Comments

The following comments were from residents who attended the Parks Board meeting:

- Kevin Currier – has taken his dog to this basin daily for two (2) years and that it is a safe area for dogs, never overcrowded, owners always with their dogs and no violence or fights.
- Debra Pennington – has gone to this basin for eight (8) years, and still goes even though she no longer lives in the neighborhood. She said the dog owners love the park, clean up after themselves, and never have problems with anyone. Recently a resident has said they are bringing drugs in, prostitution going on. She said it may be occurring at night but not during the day. She's tired of the police and park rangers being called about her using the park and added that she was recently assaulted in the basin by a resident. She said everyone should be able to get along and be used by both children and dogs. She was concerned about the service gate that was removed and said it was theft of City property.
- Jo Gardner – has lived in area since 1994. She feels that an off leash area is an opportunity for residents to keep the basin clean and serve as a neighborhood watch for that community. She pointed out that the issues with drugs and vandalism happen all over the city, not just in this park. She said over 400 neighbors have signed a petition in support of using the basin as an off-leash dog area.
- Sean Lian – lived in the area since 2000. Utilizes the park with his dogs, the park is always clean and picked up. He offered to maintain the park with the assistance of some of the neighbors if necessary to keep the park open. He would like to see the park return to an enclosed area.
- Steve Snitzer – helped gather petition signatures and also signed up volunteers to do maintenance on the park and replace the gate structure. He has done research on off-leash dog areas in valley cities and nationally. Mesa is very short on a state and national level with cities of comparable size. The norm would be 5-7 off-leash facilities for a city this size. This facility is unique and too small with not enough parking, but it would be perfect for an example for other communities within the city to bring off-leash dog usage

to their areas if they are willing to put together a volunteer structure and commitment from the community. He is in favor of having the basin returned to an off-leash dog area.

- Lori Smith – said she is awoken regularly by the dogs and their owners in the basin. She showed copies of work orders from the City to place doggie pots in the park but said there were no work orders for a gate to be installed. She said the park is not being utilized for recreational activities due to the large dogs in the park. She said the dog owners are utilizing City water and one of the dog owners flooded the park. She passed around pictures of various dogs/owners in the park.
- Peggy Robinson – has used the park for an off-leash area. She said she was unaware of any issues of drugs or prostitution in the park. She said the owners are responsible for their pets and she is in favor of making the basin an off-leash area.
- Leroy Eshlman Jr. – there are a variety of animals living within the vicinity of the basin. He said some of the neighbors miss the people bringing their dogs to the park.

Mr. Goodrum reiterated that staff recommends a neighborhood meeting be held to gather feedback from residents representing both positions in this disagreement. This feedback will be presented to the Board at the May 12th meeting when the Board can make a final determination on how Basin 420 should be designated and used.

Ms. Udall felt that waiting until the next meeting is too long to wait to address this issue. Mr. Heirshberg said the Board can call a special meeting if they desire.

Mr. Goodrum said he thinks the main objective is to hold a neighborhood meeting to gather feedback from residents.

Mr. Wills asked if the Board has the right to designate this basin as a dog park. Ms. Moore clarified that City code allows the Director to designate both on-leash and off-leash areas. Staff would request a recommendation from the Board about the designation.

Ms. Wilson favored the idea of a public meeting to enable citizens to speak about the issue.

Mr. Goodrum asked if the Board was in agreement to hold a special meeting after the neighborhood meeting if time permits. The Board was in agreement.

Mr. Goodrum asked to have it noted in the minutes that an email was received from a resident regarding Basin 420.

Discuss and take action on policy regarding leashed dogs in parks

Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman told the Board the Dogs in Parks subcommittee wanted to ensure that the Board and staff all have the same understanding about the action to be taken on the issue of dogs in parks.

Dale Furnas shared an email received from a citizen regarding dogs in Red Mountain Park. She thanked the subcommittee for their work on this issue during the past year.

Mr. Heirshberg addressed the Board and told them that if the Board accepts the subcommittee's recommendation he will move forward and put this issue on a Council agenda for presentation recommending that leashed dogs (with 6' maximum leash) be allowed in all Mesa parks, and inclusive of a public education engagement campaign promoting responsible dog ownership.

Ms. Furnas told the Board that the subcommittee recommends allowing leashed dogs in all City of Mesa parks with the exception of sports complexes, sports/athletic fields, sport courts,

ramadas and playgrounds as soon as a citizen/public information campaign can be implemented.

Jessie Brodersen from the Public Information Office (PIO) reviewed the information for the strategic communication plan with the Board.

Ms. Wilson asked if there was a law or anything enforceable to add “teeth” to this issue. Ms. Brodersen stated that there are laws regarding maximum leash length allowed. She said that the Park Rangers would be able to write citations if necessary.

Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman added that it would be great if this issue was a valley-wide campaign with other cities who share this issue.

Mr. Goodrum asked if there was any further discussion on this issue. There was no further discussion. Mr. Goodrum asked for a recommendation on the subcommittee recommendation to allow leashed dogs in Mesa parks in designated areas. Mr. Alger made a motion, Matt Shaffer seconded and it was approved to implement the recommendation as written.

Director’s Comments

Mr. Heirshberg gave the Board informational updates as follows:

- Spring Training update - Five games have been played with 34,000 people attending the first 3 games.
- Playful City sign unveiling – Held March 1 at Sycamore Light Rail Station.
- Summer programs open registration begins April 15 for Aquatics and April 26 for summer programs.
- Fees and charges update – Presented to Audit & Finance Committee February 22, goes to Council at Study Session on March 22, then City Council following week.
- Basin 601 safety concerns – Basin located in Marlborough Mesa neighborhood. Staff met with some of the residents regarding some issues in the basin (homeless residents sleeping on benches in park, vehicles in basins). Residents also requested to rename basin Marlborough Mesa Park.
- Upcoming events:
 - Special Olympics Cheerleading & Basketball State Games, March 26-27, various Mesa school locations
 - Day of Play, March 6, Pioneer Park
 - Skyline Pool Groundbreaking, March 24, 10:00 a.m.
 - Spring Break Camps at Webster Recreation Center; Jefferson Recreation Center closed for floor renovations
 - FlowRider open beginning March 13-20 for Spring Break

Reports on meetings and/or events attended by Board Members

Mr. Shaffer attended the Community Day of Play event at Red Mountain Park on January 30 and at Pioneer Park on March 6; great events.

Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman attended Dogs in Parks subcommittee meeting on February 25 and visited local basins, will be attending 2nd Friday event this week.

Ms. Udall attended the Community Day of Play event at Pioneer Park on March 6 and the Blues Blast concert at the Mesa Amphitheatre on February 27.

Ms. Wilson attended soccer games at Harmony Park and the Community Day of Play event at Pioneer Park on March 6.

Mr. Wills attended Dogs in Parks subcommittee meeting on February 25; synchronized swimming team held regional meet at Kino Pool and a team picnic at Riverview Park.

Mr. Fort attended the Play Ball exhibit at Arizona Museum for Youth (AMFY), Dogs in Parks subcommittee meeting on February 25, Fergie & Feller Field naming event at Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport, attended spring training games at Hohokam Stadium.

Mr. Ikeda attended the Playful City Light Rail Sign Dedication ceremony, the Play Ball exhibit at AMFY, and worked the spring training games at Hohokam Stadium.

Mr. Goodrum asked if there were any other items for discussion; the Board had no additional comments. Mr. Alger made a motion to adjourn, Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman seconded, and it was unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marc Heirshberg, CPRP
PRCF Director